

The Philosopher's Elusive Subject : On the Problem of the 'Present' in the 'Political'

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ABSTRACT

Much Eurocentric critical political-legal philosophy begins with a disappointment with the present, with totality-as-is and with the subject of the 'political'. The philosophical burden thus understood is to reclaim the 'excess' of totality for the possibility of the 'political' as the 'real' of ruptural subjectivity, as a Becoming out of the closures of present Being/Non-Being; Alan Norrie and Alain Badiou are, respectively, representative of the 'immanentist' and transcendental versions of this critical project of reclaiming the subject of philosophy from the closures of the present. In this essay, adopting a lens of coloniality, I suggest that underpinning this ontologic-epistemology of post-Enlightenment Eurocentric thinking is an assumption of Nothingness that defines the originary-object which requires the invention of the philosophical problem, which requires the becoming-subject-in-the-political. I argue instead that the present is defined not by absence/inexistence, not by Non-Being/Nothingness outside of the political, but by Other/Different-Being whose Exteriority is that which continues to be negated in theory-practice. Such a perspectival shift points to the decolonial necessity of the negation of the 'political' itself, of the struggle for desubjectification..

KEY WORDS: Totality, philosophy in the present, the political-legal subject, Alan Norrie, Alain Badiou, coloniality of ontology, desubjectification.

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I. The Present as Problem.

[T]he philosopher intervenes when in the situation ... there are things that appear to him as signs, signs that it is necessary to invent a new problem. That's the point, the philosopher intervenes when he finds, in the present, the signs that point to the need for a new problem, a new invention.²

A feature of the writings of the (Westernized) critical Left is the sense of crises, of loss, that permeates much recent contemplations on hope in the face of the present - on democracy, on utopia, on political-legal belonging, on the very possibility of politics itself.³ For the philosopher born out of the Western tradition who invested faith in the 'revolutionary enthusiasm', as Alan Norrie has called it, of the 'modern' age, this has been a gradual but sure disillusionment.⁴ The source of anguish is not simply that 'bad' things have happened in the name of enlightened progress, not just that the conditions for Man's liberation appear ever surely to be deteriorating, but more significantly, that the way out of the prevailing hopelessness does not present itself clearly to philosophical thought as the present is contemplated.⁵ But what of the 'present'?

² Alain Badiou, 'Thinking the Event', in Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek (ed. Peter Engelmann, trans. Peter Thomas and Alberto Toscano), *Philosophy in the Present*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 2.

³ I use this term in a broader sense to include what Slavoj Žižek disparagingly labels the 'principled Left' as well as thinkers such as Žižek himself. See, Slavoj Žižek, 'The Ongoing 'Soft Revolution'', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 30 (2), 2004, 292-323.

⁴ Alan Norrie, *Law and the Beautiful Soul* (London: Glasshouse Press, 2005), p. 196.

⁵ Concerned 'Western' thought is replete with bemoaning of some lost innocence, it would seem, that give rise to thinking in 'crisis'. A truncated time-line of disappointments giving rise to the loss of the epistemological certainties of post-Enlightenment thought may be viewed as follows. First, the loss of philosophical innocence and hope attached to an assumed Age of Man and of Rights resulting from the two 'World Wars' and the Jewish Holocaust - inflicted upon the peoples of Europe not by some 'barbarian' tribe of the 'uncivilised' world but by the very rational 'civilisation' of Europe herself. Then, the 'evils' perpetrated under the name of the radical utopian project of actually existing state Communisms, coupled with the 'failure' of the almost-revolutions of '1968', marking an irreparable suspicion of all grand Utopian imaginations for a liberation to come. Finally, the witnessed dismantling of 'citizenship' as the Welfare State is relinquished to the neo-liberal discipline of global capitalism whose effects we see vividly unfold today as the Western World becomes victim too to 'structural adjustment'. And so, for example, with this correction by historical actuality of the brief flirtation of the Western mind with promises of a universal Humanity very much at the forefront, Ronald Aronson asks the question: 'Is there reason to hope today?' ('Hope After Hope', *Social Research* Vol. 66 (2), 1999, 471-94, p. 471), and Fredric Jameson: 'Does this peculiar entity [Utopia] still have a social function?'

For the purpose of this essay, the 'present' here signifies two aspects relevant to the philosopher's subject.

First, the present as the totality-that-is, as-is. The subject of philosophy, envisaged as being concerned with revealing (inventing) the truths, be they immanent or transcendental, of collective human perfectibility as the possibility of Becoming - out of irrationality, inequality and domination, to rationality, equality and universal freedom – appears to have been appropriated instead by a liberal democratic consensus where a fetishized present is presented as an already arrived-at future of human Being-ness.⁶ For the critical post-Enlightenment philosopher, it is a difficult admission, a problem even, that the present (post)Modernity of global capitalism, as totality, is the actual, prevailing, historical manifestation of the ideals of the European Enlightenment, notwithstanding the anticipated objection that other 'enlightened' futures remain ever open to the situation of the present. (We will return to this argument later).

Secondly, the present as signifying those who are present as 'political', as the 'subjects' of sovereignty - 'Man', that radical figure of liberty, the (ideal) subject born out of the Enlightenment, the possessor of 'rights' and sovereignty, the carrier of the Enlightenment's project of liberation. The actual, embodied, folk that adorn the mantle 'subject' in (post)Modernity appear ever in precarity under the conditions of modern, global, capitalist freedom in two mutated forms (as actual) in historical time. On the one hand we see the transformation of the (post)Modern rights-bearing 'citizen' as the compliant and complacent, hedonistic, consuming, periodic caster of votes (even if she is occasionally liable to eruption as witnessed in the recent 'riots' in the UK and those ongoing in other 'austerity' zones in Europe, and in the various Occupy movements around the world);⁷ the 'free' subject here

('The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review* Vol. 25, 2004, 35-54. p. 35). Little of this introspection, however, addresses the violent histories of the 'West' prior to Europe's fall from 'Enlightened' grace.

⁶ For useful general critiques of the liberal appropriation of politics, or more specifically, of the 'political' as the essential feature of what is generally called politics in daily usage, see Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005); Jacques Ranciere (trans. Liz Heron), *On the Shores of Politics* (London: Verso, 1995); and Andreas Schedler ed., *The End of Politics? Explorations into Modern Antipolitics* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1997).

⁷ It would obviously be a mistake to posit some homogenous explanation for or motivation to the various 'occupations' and their participants. Posed as a question, we might wonder if such eruptions 'from below' indicate a demand for subjectivity and rights, or whether they are manifestations of 'desubjectification'; we will return to this point in the concluding discussion.

becomes the object of Foucaultian ‘government of individualization’,⁸ of Rancierian ‘police’,⁹ ordered (in both senses of the term) to ‘live’, disciplined, domesticated, and accounted for, by the institutions of citizenship (of welfare, health, education, the ‘market’) that define the contemporary sites of (re)production and consumption, committed only to a ‘disengaged imagination’, as Zygmunt Bauman put it, as s/he pursues the aspirations of individual emancipation in the market-place of desires.¹⁰ In these times of the post-political, post-ideological consensus, therefore, the ‘future’ is already in the present – the liberated subject, as the present, the counted, stands as the (hopefully) wage-earning, consumer-citizen, obsessed with the promise of individual pleasure, gripped by fear and suspicion, manipulated by the anti-politics of a (neo)liberal democracy as precarious ‘rights’ are sought for and dispensed – the ‘most that we can hope for’, perhaps.¹¹ On the other hand, we find the present (in ‘absence’, as some view it) as the abject rightless of Hannah Arendt, the ‘abandoned’ *homo sacer* of Giorgio Agamben’s sovereign exception, the destitute figures of ‘superfluity’, as Susan Marks has described it,¹² cast aside in the fault-lines of contemporary ‘sovereign’ arrangements of belongings and exclusions. In both cases, ‘Man’ stands pacified if not defeated, if not dispensed with altogether in the most extreme scenarios, in the present of (post)Modernity; a philosophical ideal subsumed, it seems, by the actuals of historical politics, notwithstanding the best Rancierian efforts of rescue.¹³ It is a further harsh reality that the fear-ridden ‘consumer-citizen’, and the ‘rightless’, under conditions of both (post)modern ‘liberal-democratic’ and ‘Third World’ despotisms, are also the actual of the Enlightenment-birthed subject.

For the critical post-Enlightenment philosopher, therefore, thinking begins with the recognition that the present disappoints - both in the sense of the ‘totality’ that has become

⁸ Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8 (4), 1982, 777-95, p. 781.

⁹ Jacques Ranciere (trans. Steven Corcoran), *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010), esp. Part 1, ‘The Aesthetics of Politics’.

¹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Utopia with no Topos’, *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 16 (1), 2003, 11-25.

¹¹ Wendy Brown, ‘The Most We Can Hope For...: Human Rights and the Politics of Fatalism’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 103 (2/3), 2004, 451-63.

¹² Respectively, Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951), Chapter on ‘Perplexities of the Rights of Man’; Giorgio Agamben (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford Uni. Press, 1998), and Susan Marks, ‘Law and the Production of Superfluity’, *Transnational Legal Theory*, Vol. 2 (1), 2011, 1-24.

¹³ Ranciere, *Dissensus*, Chap. 3.

the world-as-is, and in the sense of the presence of 'subjects' who inhabit it. Remaining unredeemed by the totality/subject of the 'present' is the philosopher's faith in the possible human futures of universal emancipation portended by the Enlightenment – the original 'white man's burden' as it were. As Costas Douzinas notes with reference to human rights - that most evocative of the Enlightenment's emblematic promise of universal Becoming, '[o]ne could write the history of human rights as the ongoing and always failing struggle to close the gap between the abstract man and the concrete citizen: to add flesh, blood and sex to the pale outline of the human.'¹⁴ The gap between the 'abstract man' and the 'concrete citizen', between rights and rightlessness, between freedom, and unfreedom, between the hope for 'emancipation' and despair of suffering, between the 'rhetoric of (capitalist) modernity' (salvation) and the 'logic of coloniality' (imperial domination),¹⁵ of the inhumanity of Humanity, this gap is in essence the great chasm that defines the rupture between the faith of the (philosophers of the) 'West' and the fate of the rest subjected to a violent world order rationalised and organised by the assertion of 'sovereign' power, even as it increasingly finds purportedly 'cosmopolitan' expression.¹⁶ Cleary, it is a troubled faith, standing as it does ceaselessly accused by the 'failing struggle' to redeem actual fates.

Confronted with such problems *with* the present, we have not been short of critical and creative philosophical responses and attempted rescues. Interestingly, we also witness an apparent revitalized claim of the philosophical and political value of the European Enlightenment as an original point of departure in response to the present in recent critical Western contemplations that seek to rescue the philosopher's subject - this after the suspicions and anxieties, and guilt of early 20th Century critical thinkers who worried about the crisis of the European Man,¹⁷ and the anguish of sceptics such as Arendt, Foucault and Derrida (and Agamben it should be added) who could see little scope of reconciling a

¹⁴ Costas Douzinas, 'The Many Faces of Humanitarianism', *PARRHESIA*, No. 2, 2007, 1-28, p. 3.

¹⁵ Walter D. Mignolo, 'Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity', *American Literary History*, 2006, 312-31, p. 312.

¹⁶ For an analysis and critique of cosmopolitan appropriations of humanity, and relatedly, of human rights, see, Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007).

¹⁷ See Leela Gandhi, 'Postcolonial theory and the crisis of the European man', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 10 (1), 2007, 93-110.

collective and universal freedom with post-Enlightenment sovereign orders.¹⁸ From the impasse and anguish of the recent critical theoretical past, we instead find a resurgent contemporary engagement within Eurocentric critical theory circles with the following questions: how to contend with the (variously constructed) rightsless ‘Other’ (as non-subject) in an age of human rights?; how to reclaim theories of hope from the ashes of its brutal pasts (and presents)?; how indeed to reclaim ‘democracy’, and to rescue citizenship from its present depoliticisation into a mechanism for negotiating the conservative consensus of neo-liberal politico-economic and social ordering?¹⁹ Reframing these observable preoccupations of current critical thinking in terms of the dual crises of the ‘present’ – of totality and the subject – as presented here, we might understand the underlying concern, and revitalized commitment, of the philosopher as essentially focussed on the following two ‘problems’:

- to reclaim the ‘political’ from the apparent pervasiveness of contemporary global capitalism-under-sovereignty that defines the present as a closed totality
- to rescue the subject from her colonisation as citizen-consumer, or her abjection in exclusion from ‘political-legal belonging’, and to return her to her path of subversive, progressive, ‘political’ Being/Becoming

With respect both these strands of contemporary efforts of philosophical invention, the critical labour, we see, is to reclaim, from the apparent closures of present political discourse, the prized philosophical categories that have defined, for the critical Western mind, the hope that was the Enlightenment.

To cite a few notable examples of these philosophical rescue missions we might refer to Alan Norrie’s re-presentation of Roy Bhaskar’s ‘dialectical critical realism’ as an attempt is to perfect the philosophical tapestry of enlightened ‘constellational’ reason towards an ‘eudaimonic’ society,²⁰ or to Alain Badiou and his insistence that the subject is the

¹⁸ For an interesting narration of critical thought’s troubled engagement with ‘freedom’, see Dianne Enns, *Speaking of Freedom: Philosophy, Politics and the Struggle for Liberation* (Stanford: Stamford Uni. Press, 2007).

¹⁹ The crisis of ‘democracy’ indeed has been at the forefront of much recent lamentation. A compilation of the critical good and the great in a collective contemplation of the present of democracy can be found in Giorgio Agamben *et al* (trans. William McCuaig), *Democracy In What State?* (New York: Columbia Uni. Press, 2011).

²⁰ Alan Norrie, *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical critical realism and the grounds for justice* (London: Routledge, 2010).

transcendent one who becomes in fidelity to the radical new truth of the ruptural Event;²¹ or to Slavoj Žižek's appeal for the defence of 'lost causes' and a reclaiming of 'terror' and 'egalitarian justice' as the asserted original truths of the Enlightenment;²² or to Jacques Rancière's radicalisation of the subject as the one who becomes as s/he enacts 'dissensus' from the non-part, the non-comprehensible to 'language', against the consensus of the 'sensible';²³ or to Sergei Prozorov's re-reading of Foucault to announce the possibility of a return to the 'sovereign subject' as the one who becomes 'bare life' by the refusal of the embrace of biopolitical care,²⁴ or to Engin F. Isin's reconceptualization of the 'City' as a social geography of contested citizenship through the struggles of insurgent practices of 'becoming-political'.²⁵ In their various ways, they explicitly attempt to recover imaginations of totality and meanings of subject as a possibility of 'Becoming' (a future) out the stasis of (non)'Being' (the present) within the current utopia of non/anti-utopia consistent with the aspirational promise of early Enlightenment thought. In their different ways, they seek to point to the non-closure of 'politics' in the present, and to the possibility, even necessity, of thinking, and acting, beyond the contemporary actuals of the world. This is, no doubt, important and exciting thinking; with such 'inventions' of the contemporary philosophical problem, in the Badiouian sense, is the future not exhausted in the present, and the present not exhaustive of future subjectivity. For the critical thinker who is not content to suppose that the trajectory of progress so promised by the Enlightenment finds its endpoint in the prevailing manifestation of (post)Modernity - of emancipation as the freedom to contract, of the body politic as the free market, of democracy as the periodic election of the same, of the present incarnation of the subject as a domesticated 'consumer-citizen' or *homo sacer* - these philosophical pathways are essential, for they revive the promise of the Enlightenment as a return to some original possibility for human futures amidst the many disappointments in the present.

But, here we arrive at the (different) 'problem' as it concerns this essay. From the many problems *with* the present, we turn instead to an interrogation of the 'present' itself as the problem.

²¹ Alain Badiou (trans. Bruno Bosteels), *Theory of the Subject* (London: Continuum, 2009).

²² Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008).

²³ Rancière, *Dissensus*

²⁴ Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

²⁵ Engin F. Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: Uni. Of Minnesota Press, 2002).

What we witness in the contemplative ‘inventions’ of the critical Eurocentric philosopher is, as I see it, but a return to philosophical wombs; the Western philosopher’s perplexity *with* the present finds critical outlet more as a confrontation with the challenge of rescuing ‘philosophy’ itself – the Western tradition and its flowering into the Enlightenment - from the closures portended by the actualities of the present (post)Modern, neoliberal capitalist global order. We see this in much of the literature mentioned above (and we will expand on this argument further below); it would seem that the preoccupation of the critical Eurocentric philosopher (in the diverse articulations offered) relates to the challenge of how to think against/after/beyond the closures of the ‘actual’ orderings of (exceptional) sovereignty so as to rescue the philosophical ‘ideals’ of freedom promised by the Enlightenment. Useful as these contemplations may be to challenge the asserted civilisational ideal-in-the-actual of the (neo-)liberal consensus that defines most political discourse and practice, they still remain the searching thoughts of a critical West asking itself, of itself, and predominantly within itself, questions about the present as it views it.

A perspective which interrogates the problem *of* the present however, begins differently. We return to the quote of Badiou with which this essay began: ‘[T]he philosopher intervenes when in the situation ... there are things that appear to him as signs, signs that it is necessary to invent a new problem. ... the philosopher intervenes when he finds, in the present, the signs that point to the need for a new problem, a new invention.’²⁶ The problem with this statement on philosophical labour proper is that although it points to the necessity to invent a new ‘problem’ from persisting signs in the present, the present itself is assumed as given, as if our viewing of it itself is amenable to a universal and universalising reading of historical experience, as if ontology is not itself subject to epistemic constraints, not open to contestations based on the lenses through which we first look upon the world to see a present as we see it. Mine is not merely a vulgar complaint of philosophy’s ‘irrelevance’ in the face of the actualities of power, violence, ‘politics’, characterised as they are by the perversities of ever more predatory colonial-Modern modalities of global order-ing regimes of ‘governance’²⁷ - such ‘unfair’ accusations might indeed be dismissed as asking of philosophy

²⁶ Badiou, ‘Thinking the Event’

²⁷ For an elaboration of the ‘colonial-modern’ configuration of world order, see Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton Uni. Press, 2000); and Walter D. Mignolo, ‘The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 101 (1), 2002, 56-96.

too much (even if such reminders require some pause and reflection!).²⁸ My argument instead is that these acts of conjuring a rescued subject of philosophy - to reclaim the possibility of the Becoming of the Enlightenment's (Hu)Man-Subject, to restate the possibilities of human futurities - are themselves limited by reason of the ontological errors which found them. A summary of the argument to follow might be useful.

(Post) Enlightenment critical Western thought remains fixated with a Totality of Being/Becoming that is based on an ontological reason of Being-Non-Being. Fundamental to this ontologic-epistemology is *Nothingness*, as a beginning, that defines the philosophical invention: *there is Being and Nothingness in History; the historical evolutionary path of human perfectibility is the Becoming out of Nothingness into Being.*

The result of this original ontological assumption is the resort to a search for an elusive 'excess' that remains open to a future totality of universal truth and to a futurity of Becoming-subject out of perceived present 'absences/inexistences'. And thus, we witness the many philosophical efforts of recovering the 'political' as an ontological possibility of Becoming-in-totality against the conservative efforts to assert the political as a negotiation of the Same. Such efforts by the critical philosopher may indeed be well-intentioned and worthwhile as far as it goes, it may well pose the ontological challenge for the 'Western-ized' colonised subject as s/he desperately seeks to cling on to the myths of 'citizenship' in a transnationalized order of human disposability. This, however, is not the full story of Beingness; the myth of 'citizenship' has little purchase for the majority of human 'subjects' for whom the 'political' has been less an idealized emergence of Becoming, and more a violent imposition of negation and expropriation. I argue therefore that the present is defined not by absence or inexistence, not by Non-Being/Nothingness outside of totality/the political, but by Other/Different-Being whose very Exteriority is that which has been, and continues to be, negated in theory-practice.²⁹ The consequence of such a disruption of Western philosophical ontological clarity is the possibility that rather than a reclaiming of the 'political', of Becoming-in-totality, of Becoming-subject as envisaged by much critical western thinking as the progressive ends of philosophy, the decolonial possibility (and threat) is the negation

²⁸ Critical self-reflection by the theorist as 'theories' as contemplated is always necessary, but less frequently done. I am grateful for the provocations of Upendra Baxi in this regard; Upendra Baxi, *Human Rights in a Posthuman World: Critical Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford Uni. Press, 2007), Chap. 1.

²⁹ For the distinction between totality and Totality, and between exteriority and Exteriority, see Jayan Nayar, 'The Politics of Hope and the Other-in-the-World: Thinking Exteriority', *Law and Critique* (forthcoming)

instead of the ‘political’ itself (with all its post-Enlightenment baggage) and, from this, a necessary recognition of desubjectification.

We first take a brief, and indicative tour through the critical philosopher’s meanderings through the present of totality and its ‘excess’, of the ‘ideal’, the ‘actual’, and the reclaimings of the ‘real’, in order to reveal the ontological assumptions that underpin these attempts to rescue (post) Enlightenment philosophical ideals. We then elaborate on the assumption of the political that defines the critical philosopher’s concern and disappointment with the present and reintroduce a lens of coloniality through which the present might be differently viewed.³⁰ A concluding suggestion is then presented - that perhaps what we witness in the insurgent recalcitrance of so many who are the ‘wretched of the earth’ are the manifold struggles, not for the prize of becoming-subject, but, instead, for desubjectification.

II. Excess-ing Totality.

The present-day critical philosopher begins with a disappointment with her present-as-totality; the philosophical vocation thus is to open up particularist manifestations of the present-as-totality to the truth of an inexhaustible Totality as encompassing the possibility of futures true to the universalist promise of the Enlightenment so understood. As we shall see running through the various attempts to rescue Totality from the totality of ‘sovereign’ presents is a resort to an (indeterminate) futurity of the ‘real’ in which the excess, the remnant of the ‘ideal’, may be redeemed from the ‘actuals’ of history. Always in the future, to come, a

³⁰ A little needs to be said at this juncture on the matter of terminology, of the ‘colonial’ and ‘coloniality’. I am not concerned here with the argument the ‘colonial’ has existed, or differently exists, in multifarious contexts of human engagement, and therefore, that this resort to ‘coloniality’ as a perspectival orientation is flawed – a point which a colleague was keen to raise with me during a seminar considering the ideas in this essay. This argument misses the point. We are not dealing here with issues of colonialisms *per se*, instead we address here a form of politico-economic-socio-philosophical construction of the world as a World, initiated as it was through the colonial experience, and the coloniality of the idea, and ideas, of ‘Europe’ as it was founded upon the negation of Other/Different-Being. It is this attempt to universalize, globalize and totalize worlds into a World that concerns me. For a more sustained discussion of coloniality in terms adopted in this essay, see Anibal Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America’, *International Sociology*, Vol. 15(2), 2000, 215-32; Mignolo, *Local Histories*; Ramon Grosfoguel, ‘Transmodernity, border thinking, and global coloniality: Decolonizing political economy and postcolonial studies’, *Eurozine*, 2008, at <http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2008-07-04-grosfoguel-en.pdf>

beyond the present, to be born, a Becoming, is resurrected the ideal from the betrayals of the historical present, and reaffirmed, the philosopher's subject.

No doubt, a considerable distance separates the various notions of what constitutes the 'resurrection' in critical post/neo-Enlightenment critical thinking; the 'excess' that awaits redemption is differently anticipated either from within existing sovereign logics of the political or in the arrival of some yet unbeknownst post-sovereign politics; the futurity of excess (as a modality of Becoming) is hence also variously envisaged. Yet, such differences aside, the underlying recourse to a future awaiting redemption remains consistent in much contemporary (progressive Western-ized) critical thinking. Two orientations, broadly speaking – indeed many shades of grey inhabit the spaces within the range - are evident in relation to the attempt to rupture the closure of the present; one, that places faith in the 'immanent'; the second, in the 'transcendent'.

Critical philosophies that seek hope in immanence seek to suggest that the possibility of Becoming into a path to the future is opened up from truths that persist within the present, as latent, awaiting its moment through the historically contingent resolution of the inherent contradictions, of the dialectical tensions, that persist notwithstanding the assertions of ideal-closures. This view holds that within totality (as present) lies its own incompleteness which pushes incessantly towards the possibility of the real (Totality), lies the subject to-come as one who is ever more complete in herself and in her solidarity with the Other. On both these counts, 'immanence' consoles 'absence'. This is an interesting philosophical manoeuvre. On the one hand, the continuing wretchedness of the majority of 'Humanity' is explained as an incomplete realisation of the 'ideal' - as absences, denials, exclusions - that remain open to correction. As a second move, it reaffirms the faith in the 'ideal' itself; Humanity's redemption is still maintained as being contained within the faith-system of the Enlightenment, salvation remaining always as truth within the faith, notwithstanding the 'actuals' that continue to define totality-as-is. By way of example, we refer to Alan Norrie's concluding reflections on hope notwithstanding law's history of 'injustice':

In the face of individual, social and natural alienation, expressive moral demands for self-actualisation and oneness of humankind with itself and nature remain on the horizon of modern life. ... We are aware of the social injustices that law perpetuates, which necessarily work their way into its own systems and practices ... However, when the law seeks in its own terms to do justice, even on a terrain of injustice, when it moves back and forth between the antinomies which constitute it, does it not also reach towards a justice that lies beyond it, and

that echoes inchoately within it? Might this not be the remnant of that expressive morality on which modernity was founded, but which was repressed by being channelled into the social forms through which humankind lives today?³¹

Faith is here retained by the consolation that the ‘remnant’ inherent in the antinomial nature of law (and justice) remains always open to constant recovery, never quite negated by the present totality of law’s temporal justice.³² The political task for the philosopher-activist following from this, by implication, would be to instigate for such contestations, such ‘immanent critique’, knowing full well law’s (totality’s) tendencies towards the conservation of the Same, with the hope that on any given occasion of law’s movement between its ‘back and forth’ may be redeemed the ‘expressive morality on which modernity was founded’, and whereupon may be realised, in that instant, the ‘historically emergent demand for human perfectibility and freedom (the ideal moral pulse or charge of the Enlightenment)’.³³ An obvious question, as Emiliios Christodoulidis rightly asks, is ‘*how long can the law limp along its modality of lack while still holding the promise of responsiveness?*’³⁴

It would appear that for Norrie, elaborating on Roy Bhaskar’s ‘dialectical critical realism’, this although an understandable question, is one which does not fundamentally undermine the project of the ‘ideal’ as a passage of natural necessity towards Eudaimonia. Quite the opposite. The notion of an ever open, ever discoverable truth of Totality (constituted by the many partial, sub, and yet to come totalities), variously subject to the historical negotiations and outcomes of ‘holistic causality’, and mediations between the ‘parts of the whole’, seen as a whole of differences (heterology), means that the ‘scientific’ role of philosophical enquiry pertains to deepening the understanding and possibilities of a ‘constellational ethics’ (one

³¹ Norrie, *Beautiful Soul*, p. 196.

³² Peter Fitzpatrick, notwithstanding his many critical denunciations of modern law’s mythologies and colonial continuities, in similar terms finds (still) in sovereign law’s contradictory tendencies towards ‘determination’ (the fixity of systems and processes), on the one hand, and its responsiveness to its excess, or remainder (the possibility of rupture that remains perpetually latent), on the other, a residual hope for justice beyond law; see Peter Fitzpatrick, “‘New Constitutionalism’: Globalism and the constitution(s) of nations’, *Law, Democracy and Development*, Vol. 10(2), 2006, 1-20; and, ‘Is humanity enough? The Secular Theology of Human Rights’, *Law, Social Justice & Global Development (LGD)*, 2007 (1) at http://www.go.warwick.ac.uk/elj/lgd/2007_1/fitzpatrick

³³ Norrie, *Beautiful Soul*, p. 181.

³⁴ Emiliios Christodoulidis, ‘Strategies of Rupture’, *Law and Critique*, Vol. 20, 2009, 3-26, p. 19 (emphasis in original).

wonders whether as a matter of inevitability) towards an eudaimonic society. This is impressive stuff, consistent in its own internal constructions. Philosophically at least, there is in this argument a clear reclaiming of possibility from present enclosures, however perverse and pervasive present totalities may be. Clearly, Norrie's concern is to chart pathways out of the prevailing philosophical/ideological wisdoms which present a closed totality of the ideal-in-the-actual. Also clear is that the fate of the rest (the Other that is present in totality, for Norrie, as absence) underpins the ethical motivations for an excavations of the ontological depth of the world as contingent relationalities. All this is commendable. Certainly, any rupturing of present complacencies is to be welcomed; Norrie's thinking potentially provokes action in the form of strategic interventions to disrupt the totality of presence/absence, against the fixity of law's present, as it is historically constructed and resisted.³⁵ This said, in this assumption of an 'holistic' viewing of the world as real possibility and historically contingent actuality, the presents of continuing 'absences' and failures notwithstanding such interruptions of immanent critique, interestingly, find an explanation within philosophy itself for Norrie:

Incompleteness, fallibility and inconsistency are part of the messiness of morality ... Nonetheless, the (ideal) road to eudaimonia is not a straight one, and (*actual*) *wrong turnings, not to mention regressions, are to be expected along the way.* ... In a world that is an open system in spatio-temporal process, and subject to detotalising tendencies, *contingencies and effects arise which in the circumstances may lead to, and in a sense justify, 'backsliding'.* ... When they do, backsliding is more than just a failure to act morally. *It is a sign of the limits of, or limited possibilities for, moral advance in a particular context.*³⁶

It would appear that Norrie's dialectical critical realism, for all its progressive hopefulness, for all its insistence that history (as present) is never 'flat', and despite the many instances when such immanent critique of the present might indeed provide glimmers of respite from oppressive circumstances in the lived experiences of individual and communities, serves to provide also a consolation, a respite from discontentment, a philosophical rationalization of failure; Norrie's take on dialectics, critical and (differently) realist though it might be, nevertheless enables the world of the present (totality as is), to be squared with

³⁵ For a more focussed elaboration of the strategic potentiality (and limits) of immanent critique and its implications, see Christodoulidis, *ibid.*

³⁶ Norrie, *Dialectic*, p. 151 (reference omitted, emphases my own)

disappointment, even excused, and a comforting future possibility reaffirmed to philosophy (and the philosopher), despite the persistent ‘messiness’ of the ‘sovereign’ orders that continue to block the path towards eudaimonic futures. This is quite the working of philosophical sophistry – every struggle waged and respite achieved against the prevailing orders of the world may thus be claimed to be a vindication of the immanent truth of the Enlightenment; every continuing order of violence and its inflictions of suffering may be conversely, rationalised with a shrug of a philosophical shoulder, as a Becoming whose time has not yet come, yet remaining immanent always, in perpetuity if need be. This is philosophy which has constructed for itself and its prophets a bunker that keeps it safe from question, from despair, for who can argue against the constant mantra that essentially repeats ‘not-yet, that’s all’?

Transcendental notions of excess provide a very different take on the redemptive futurity of the possibility of the political out of the present. There is no call to patience here as the ‘back and forth’ of liberal institutions are allowed their play, no rationalisations of contingency and backsliding.³⁷ Instead a different, heroic, ‘fidelity’ is demanded, one which would maintain the ever imminent (rather than immanent) possibility of an unknowable, transgressive,

³⁷ Zizek’s criticism of the ‘inherent stupidity of the “principled Left”’, in their ‘compulsion’ to act, to do good, is scathing and worth noting:

If today’s “postpolitics” is opportunistic pragmatism with no principles, then the predominant leftist reaction to it can be aptly characterized as principled opportunism: one simply sticks to old formulas (such as the welfare state) and calls them principles, dispensing with the detailed analysis of how the situation changed – and thus retaining one’s position of Beautiful Soul. The inherent stupidity of the “principled” Left is clearly discernable in its standard reproach to any analysis that proposes a more complex picture of the situation, renouncing any simple prescriptions on how to act. “There is no clear political stance involved in your theory” – and this from people with no stance but their principled opportunism. Against such a stance, one should gather the courage to claim that the only way to effectively remain open to the revolutionary chance is to renounce easy calls to direct action, which necessarily involve us in an activity where things change so that the totality remains the same. Today’s predicament is that, if we succumb to the urge of directly doing something (for example, engaging in the antiglobalist struggle, helping the poor), we will certainly and undoubtedly contribute to the reproduction of the existing order. The only way to lay the foundation for a true, radical change is to withdraw from the compulsion to act, to do nothing – and thus, to open up the space for a different kind of activity.’, Zizek, *Soft Revolution*, pp. 315-16. It is interesting that whilst Zizek is scathing of the order-preserving orientations of the ‘principled Left’, he says little about, appears to have little cognizance of, his own locational complicities with respect the ‘existing order’ (as a ‘professional’, institutional ‘thinker’ permitted voice, and income, by institutions of the order). ‘We’ professional ‘thinkers’, thinking in professionalised locations, are all so implicated.

ruptural Becoming that transcends the limits of present being and knowledge, that is beyond the present; we refer to Alain Badiou by way of example. For Badiou, nothing useful comes from an exposition of the present; neither totality nor subject-as-citizen of the 'world-as-is' provides any direction for a philosophy of the 'real'. 'Repetition' as the application of the 'continuum hypothesis', defines the rationality of sovereign rule, of order, of the conservation of the topology of the Same:

A ruling class is the guardian of the place ... Its aim, both violent and hidden, is to guarantee repetition and prohibit the political subject, through the blockage of interruption.³⁸

The truth of the continuum hypothesis would make it a law that the excess within the multiple have no allocation other than the occupation of the empty place, or the existence of the inexistent proper to the initial multiple.³⁹

Politics in the present, and of those present as the accounted-for, therefore, is a politics of idealism; a conservatism, by an affirmation of the Same as an identity named, and with name, within space, that denies, the fundamental truth of the unnameable, the unknowable, that is the conjoined possibility of Event, and subjectification. Here lies the truth of the 'real' for Badiou: 'the real is no longer only what can be lacking from its place, but what *passes through by force*.'⁴⁰ This is a passing not from absence (known and knowable from within the place of totality) but 'inexistence', not from the known, it is by definition a destruction of the known, of the same, of knowledge: 'A subject is nowhere given (to knowledge). It must be found', asserts Badiou.⁴¹ Thus, we might understand the essence of Badiou's rescue of philosophy from the closure of the present. The 'Event' is the interruption of the sovereign Same, as excess, the 'supplement' that cannot be accounted for or reduced to the knowledge or language of 'what there is';⁴² it is unnameable therefore from within totality, yet, its irruption is the truth of the 'real' as a destruction of the present order and all its structures of being, an imposition of an 'impossibility for it to be otherwise'.⁴³ The subject thus becomes

³⁸ Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p. 184

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 267

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 23 (emphasis in original)

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 278.

⁴² Alain Badiou (trans. Peter Hallward), *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 41.

⁴³ Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p. 270.

as this ‘Truth-Event’ is grasped as a decision, ‘the bearer ... of a fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth.’⁴⁴

Badiou’s is a formidable narration of a subversive field of philosophy as an opening up, in thought, of the possibilities of present impossibilities. The historical failures of universal liberation here are almost an irrelevance; lessons may be learnt from them but these lessons themselves say little about the truth that always lies in the excess of the possible as an (im)possibility within the present. In addition to the notion of an inexhaustible excess within present-totality, the crucial philosophical manoeuvre here is the ascription of unknowability to the real of possibility - both as a feature of inexistence (against the hopes of immanentists who purport to know ‘absence’) and of the irruptive, Evental, destruction-reconstruction that marks the situation to come (against those defeatists who might fear the exhaustion, if not the deceit, of the Enlightenment) - as the very basis on which the truth of the impossible future as ‘real’ (always in excess) is asserted. Failure, betrayals, persistent domination and violence, a compliant citizenry, a banal present, all of these may therefore be understood as the result of persistent and manifold ‘infidelities’ perhaps, the failure of the Enlightened spirit it might be said, the consequence of (ever present, unknowable) Evental moments let slip by. Much of this might indeed be valid as a response to both the philosophical and political history of (post)Modern capitalism as it has come to be ‘actual’ following (betraying?) the Enlightenment (if such a ‘true’ belief in the Enlightenment was ever held in the first place). As an indictment against a ‘deserted philosophy’ that defines the present as future enclosed,⁴⁵ and as an unapologetic affirmation of and call for a politics of destruction against the present order, there is much in Badiou’s thought that excites – we might for this reason understand its appeal to many present-day discontents; the language of ‘the Event’ indeed lends itself as a captivating philosophical sound-bite for wished-for ‘revolutions’ (although this would of course be inconsistent with Badiou’s conception of the Event as being outside of knowability). However, as a view onto the problem *of* the present, such a Badiouian rescue remains partial, incomplete – partial because it views the present from the assumption that the locational view of a disappointed European experience is representative of a universal truth of embodied experiences, incomplete because as a partial reading of the present it fails to understand the lessons of the Other-ed experiences of Modernity-Coloniality which open up otherwise unrecognised insights into the truths of Other/Different-Being. As a result,

⁴⁴ Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 43.

⁴⁵ Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p. xxxviii

Badiou's is an impassioned philosophical position that, once its initial radical appeal is scrutinized, reveals itself to have little to say with respect to the everyday, real, un-Evental presents, and presence, of all who fail to live-up to the heroic 'fidelity' of idealised Badiouian 'subjects'.⁴⁶

Whilst both the Norriean and Badiouian enterprises may be understood as an attempt to overcome the limits of Western ontology, to expose Being to depth and interruption, still a more pervasive ontological limit remains in both. We return to this later. First, we note that for all the differences between Norrie and Badiou, what unites them in their contemplations on the present through the lens of the European experience of the Enlightenment is a fixation with, and an assumption of, the universal truth of a redeemable Enlightened Totality (the real) out of the incomplete totalities of (post)Modernity's actuals; this is all too familiar.

We might understand totality (devoid of the Divine) as the inscription of present reason on time as a manifestation of, and an approximation to, the universal truth of Totality-as-possibility. As such, totality becomes the terrain of struggle between the philosopher-priests of order/Being and the philosopher-prophets/heretics of a different (Be)Coming. For the latter (and it is the latter that concerns us) the (im)possibilities of 'Man's' reason portend the opening to reception (as a secularised Grace perhaps) the present to a different redemption – reason (and by this, following Norrie, is meant not simply a matter of epistemology but theory-practice) 'invents' the passage of movement as a trajectory of 'becoming', from Non-

⁴⁶ Nick Hewlett makes the following point:

... Badiou's portrayal of the subject coming out of the blue, his almost exclusive concentration on the event to explain the way in which movement takes place and on the exclusively retrospective relationship between subject and event, contributes to an unconvincing or at best partial description of the process of change, in politics and in other domains as well. ... [Badiou's approach to politics] largely avoids many political issues, including the questions of what the state does when it rules, the nature of exploitation, the relationship between the capitalist mode of production and liberal democracy, why revolutions happen when they do, and so on. If we do not take a more holistic view of politics then our analysis is bound to be left wanting and be less useful in terms of explaining how to counter the status quo as necessary and move onwards.

Nick Hewlett, *Badiou, Balibar, Ranciere: Re-thinking Emancipation* (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 57-9.

Whilst Hewlett's criticism comes from an analytic location and perspective of politics in 'liberal-democratic' contexts where the subject is present in a relationship of public rights antagonisms, a very different perspective of 'exploitation' and its responses can be gained from James C. Scott's understanding of the invisible 'infra-politics' of 'subaltern' groups; *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (London: Yale University Press, 1990).

Being to (new) Being.⁴⁷ This is the possible, the ‘real’ of the ideal so promised by the Enlightenment, the shared faith of both Norrie and Badiou unitedly concerned with charting the passage of the (im)possibility of universal emancipation (Totality-post-God) as a Being-to-come, beyond the consensus of the present (the status quo, the diagram, the sensible etc) that is constantly (re)presented by conservative forces as totality, as the ideal-in-the actual. The dispute between these (and other) heretical prophets is less about the ontology of Totality (Being-as-possibility) and more on the ontological bases of Becoming - on how the passage, the resurrection, may be imagined and effected. Contrasting as the different orientations of Norrie and Badiou are to critical thought, consistent in their respective attempted rescues of philosophy is this underlying presumption that Totality portends a trajectory, a passage, an ontological possibility and necessity, of Becoming as/in Totality. This being so, for both are evident the resort to philosophical techniques that conjures the futurity and unknowability of Totality beyond the ‘present’ (as constructed and viewed through the obscuring lens of post-Enlightenment epistemology) as a means by which is abled the faithful assertion (see the various expressions of ‘fidelity to the immanent/transcendent real) that, even as reality disappoints, the fundamental truths of Enlightened reason itself is redeemed by the ‘coming’ (again) of the subject, resurrected from banality (present (post)Modernity) to herald the ‘new’ age of (Hu)Man’s liberation on Earth.

All this, we can see, follows in the long, post-Enlightenment effort to philosophically extricate Totality from its Judeo-Christian roots and to birth it in Man’s sovereign reason. The problem confronted, and still unresolved, is how to reconcile the dual imperatives of Totality, of order and freedom/emancipation. The burden of ‘invention’ that is the philosophical task proper, *ala* Badiou, is all the more urgent, therefore, as such failure to reconcile order with emancipation is not an option for the present-day critical philosopher; the implication of such a disjunction is the subordination of emancipatory aspirations to the predilections of a present (exploitative) consensus. This, as we have seen, is the crux of the critical philosopher’s disappointment. And we see this problem variously having been confronted by many of the great thinkers of the critical Left/West.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding recent

⁴⁷ A clear statement of this is found in Alan Norrie’s critique of Fredric Jameson in, ‘Who is ‘The Prince’?: Hegel and Marx in Jameson and Bhaskar’, *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 20 (2), 2012, 75-104.

⁴⁸ As examples, we might refer to Arendt, Foucault, Derrida, Agamben, amongst others, as they sought to make sense of the perplexity, the undecidability, the exceptionalism, that inheres in the totality-of-sovereignty, as they each in their different ways sought to envisage the (im)possibilities of ‘freedom’; for an excellent discussion of the problematic of ‘freedom’ in this regard, see Enns, *Speaking of Freedom*.

labours therefore, the inability of post-Enlightenment thought to break free from the theological heritage of Eurocentric philosophy persists; post-Enlightenment philosophy still, it seems, is incapable of truly replacing God with Man – the many '(re)theorizations' of the 'subject' under the present conditions of a duplicitous, or as Shalini Randheria put it, 'cunning', globalised state-sovereignty,⁴⁹ for example, being essentially attempts which continue to seek a satisfactory articulation of a complete vision of Reason, now that of Man over that of God, to resolve the (Enlightened) conundrum of order/freedom. And so, after so many rich and lengthy ruminations, we are returned to the (recognisable) phraseologies and imageries of faith and consolation, to magical assertions, prayer-like; always in an indeterminate future, to come, beyond knowledge-as-is, is the universal liberation promised, as truth, have faith. For the Western critical philosopher, born in the tradition of a Judeo-Christian (and its harking back to some mythic Greco-Roman antecedent) philosophy of Totality and its languages of immanence and transcendentalism, of resurrection as it were, yet drenched in the blood of (post)colonial (post)Modern histories, dissatisfied critical thinking means wishing a 'beyond' that entails an unavoidable return to mysticisms⁵⁰ – as examples, we find an appeal to the 'openness' portended by a Nietzschean 'new dawn',⁵¹ to an Arendtian return to an innocence of a prior age before (rational) sovereign hubris and to the (im)possibility of Derrida's democracy to come,⁵² the remembering of Douzinas's 'utopian end' of human rights,⁵³ the coming one day of Agamben's 'beautiful day of life',⁵⁴ the recall

⁴⁹ Shalini Randeria, 'Between Cunning States and Unaccountable International Institutions, Social Movements and Rights of Local Communities to Common Property Resources', in Violetta Zentai and Andrea Krizsan eds., *Reshaping Globalization: Multilateral Dialogues and New Policy Initiatives* (New York: CPS Books, 2003), 101-34. Although Randeria's focus was on the 'cunningness' of 'developing' states, there is little doubt, especially since the recent crisis of 'austerity' in the face of the demands of global capitalism, that the description is true also with respect hitherto considered 'developed' states.

⁵⁰ Notwithstanding Modern Man's supposed enlightened disavowing of magic from the realm of Human Reason, notwithstanding 'his' attempt to remove God from thinking the ends of human futures, philosophers of the West are not quite reconciled, it still seems, to this attempted deicide, their 'secular' theologies of hope not quite capable of freeing us from grasping at ungraspables; see Fitzpatrick, 'Is humanity enough', pp. 4-5

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 5, 10.

⁵² See, James R. Martell, 'Can There Be Politics Without Sovereignty? Arendt, Derrida and the Question of Sovereign Inevitability', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, Vol. 6 (2), 2010, 153-66.

⁵³ Costas Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights: Critical Legal Thought at the End of the Century* (Oxford: Hart Pub., 2000), p. 380.

⁵⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 11.

from exile of Norrie's 'Beautiful Soul',⁵⁵ the coming to pass of the Zizekian resurrection of terror and egalitarian justice,⁵⁶ the 'ecstatic' return of Prozorov's sovereign subject.⁵⁷ Such resort to the language of magic - of futurity and excess - is appealing; there is always a tomorrow (a real) that remains untarnished by the betrayals of the pasts and presents of post-Enlightenment sovereign orders, always a possibility of a Humanity of 'justice' yet to come, always the 'ideal' remaining pure from historical actuality. Appealing to the West, perhaps, assuaging to the Western critical philosopher, maybe, but unsatisfactory if we extend our philosophical gaze, not just *to* the Rest from the present, but *from* the Rest to the present.

This leads us to consider the more crucial ontological error that Norrie's and Badiou's attempts to rescue the ('real') universal of the Enlightenment from its (post)Modern actuals. As mono-theist prophets of 'critical' Eurocentric philosophy, both Norrie and Badiou share a blindness to what Anibal Quijano has termed the 'coloniality of power',⁵⁸ the 'colonial difference', as Walter D. Mignolo names it,⁵⁹ the 'abyssal divide', in de Sousa Santos' terms,⁶⁰ the 'axial agonistic binary', as Festus Ikeotuonye has called it,⁶¹ to the ontological incommensurability between the ideal-'real' Being/Becoming-subject of post-Enlightenment thought and the actual Other/Different-Being of colonial-(post)Modernity, both present as ontologies (of difference) in the present.

III. Re-membering 'Non-Being'.

For the critical post-Enlightenment philosopher, the condition of Non-Being in the present is the source of concern and the injunction to thought. There is of course nothing new in this view of the ideal and the abject, it is part of the 'European legacy' after all;⁶² the presumption

⁵⁵ Norrie, *Beautiful Soul*, p. 196.

⁵⁶ Zizek, *Lost Causes*.

⁵⁷ Prozorov, *Foucault*, Part 2.

⁵⁸ Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power'.

⁵⁹ See Mignolo, *Local Histories*; Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Knowledge'.

⁶⁰ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges', *Review*, XXX-1-2007, at <http://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/AbyssalThinking.pdf>

⁶¹ Festus Ikeotuonye, 'Connexus Theory and the Agonistic Binary of Coloniality: Revisiting Fanon's Legacy', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, Special Double Issue, Summer 2007, 205-18.

⁶² Slavoj Zizek, 'A Leftist Plea for "Eurocentrism"', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24 (4). 1998, 988-1009, p. 1007.

of ontological presence/absence derives from an earlier tradition of separation that distinguished a proper human being-ness as a cultivated creature of the public sphere (bios) from the base characteristics of mere human existence (zoe). When translated into the philosophical terms of colonial-modern cosmology, we find this separation articulated in the categories of 'the political' (Being, subject with rights) and the 'non-political' or 'natural' (Non-Being, rightless non-subject) that informed the foundations of political theory onwards from Hobbes and Locke. European post-Enlightenment thought, therefore, following in this Greco-Roman then Judeo-Christian tradition of dividing the world – bios/zoe, saved/damned – continued to view the world of human-beingness as either falling within the embrace of (its) totality or being in lack. In its 'modern' narration, initially, this was the lack of (the Christian) God's grace.⁶³ Then it was the lack of 'Reason' and 'Civilisation' of the peoples in the pre-political 'State of Nature'.⁶⁴ Later still, the lack of 'development', and recently, the lack of 'democracy' and 'security'.⁶⁵ If the work of philosophers of order has been to naturalize and fix the separation of Being and Non-Being in totality, the work of critical philosophers may be understood as an attempt therefore to open this diagram, this consensus, this totality-as-Totality, to critique and to return emancipatory aspiration and possibility to closed presents. The underlying ontology of Being and Non-Being however remains intact within the framework of critical Eurocentric thought; the duality of the 'either/or' human condition in totality – either Being in the present as 'political' as subject or Non-Being in exclusion (absent/inexistent) as non-subject – defines still the subject of radical rupture in critical theory as it seeks, with all good intention, to redeem, for the wretched, the emancipatory, even revolutionary, content of the 'political' as the possibility (of the truth) of Totality.

⁶³ See the detailed consideration of the matter in the debate between the 'humanist' Sepulveda and the theologian, La Casas as the fate of 'humanness or otherwise of the 'Indians' of the 'New World' was weighed and debated; M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado, "'How oppression thrives where truth is not allowed a voice": The Spanish Polemic about the American Indians', in Gurminder K. Bhambra and Robbie Shilliam eds., *Silencing Human Rights: Critical Engagements With a Contested Project* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 19-42.

⁶⁴ Locke's masterful judgement of such lack in the 'natural' state of the Native American populations being exemplary; see, Roland Marden, "'That all men are created equal': 'Rights talk' and Exclusion in North America", in Bhambra and Shilliam, *Silencing Human Rights*, 85-101.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Mark Duffield, 'Getting Savages to Fight Barbarians: Development, Security and the Colonial Present', *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 5 (2), 2005, 141-159; Margaret Denike, 'The Human Rights of Others: Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and "Just Causes" for the "War on Terror"', *Hypatia*, Vol. 23 (2), 2008, 95-121; Douzinas, 'Humanitarianism'.

An assumption of *Nothingness* (or at least nothing worthwhile outside of the totality of the ‘political’) serves therefore as the point of departure, a pre-ontology, for critical Eurocentric thought. To be outside the ‘political’, as understood, is therefore to be in the condition of abjection as exteriority to totality, present only as an absence or inexistence, and not just for Norrie and Badiou; all talk of exclusion as being thrown back into the *natural* human condition *ala* Arendt, or talk of Becoming into the *political* as subject *ala* Ranciere, Zizek, or that of Bare Life as the other of sovereign embrace *ala* Agamben, Prozorov, all reveal variously the problematic of ontology (Being/Non-Being) as the beginning, concern and point of departure, from which the necessities of ‘inventing’ Becoming(-political) are considered.⁶⁶ From this original assumption/error of ontology is the ‘political’ thus thought as the boundary

⁶⁶ It is interesting to observe that the connection here between Arendt and Agamben. The purported abjectness of the ‘natural’ that is ‘pre-political’ life (Arendt), on the one hand, and the destitution of ‘abandonment’ to ‘bare life’ (Agamben), on the other, may be understood as versions of the same presumptions of nothingness outside of the condition proper to Man as subject in the political – the difference between Arendt and Agamben being that whilst Arendt may be understood as a prophet of hope who envisions a passage from nothingness to the political via the right to rights (the right to be subject), Agamben, may be understood instead as a prophet of resignation, nihilism even, who sees abandonment to nothingness as a condition that inheres in the political itself. Against this we encounter the likes of Badiou, Ranciere, Zizek (as examples) concerned as they are with the reclaiming of the Becoming that is the political, out of the grips of both Arendtian hope on the one hand, and Agambenian despair, on the other, with respect the totality of the same. Nevertheless, the fixation with Being and Non-Being (Nothingness) unites these various critical thinkers. On this point, Prozorov, provides an interesting twist. Whilst still maintaining the essential distinction between sovereignty (totality of the political) and abandonment (bare life) as mutually other, his rescue of the philosopher’s subject entails a positive embrace of nothingness as it were – the reclaiming of bare life as foundational sovereignty – as the act of freedom epitomized. In this respect, Prozorov, following as he does a Foucauldian tradition of concern with the capture that is subjectification, to realizing the need to break free from the assumption of subjectivity as emancipation. The problem for Prozorov, coming from the Eurocentric legacy of Totality as he does, is that this rejection of subjectivity, this escape from the embrace of biopolitical care, this “liberation from the future” (Prozorov, *Foucault*, p. 149) means a leap into an unknown, a new, a nothingness. Thus Prozorov, in his desire to rescue ‘freedom’ from the ontologies of subjectivity, stresses the ontological originality of the pre-social/political that is never quite captured by the diagram as the basis from which a post-social/political return of individual sovereignty, away from the ‘diagram’, is possible. This is all reads very much as a Hobbesian argument againtt Hobbes. What Prozorov cannot see, blind to the colonial difference, the abyssal divide of Western ontological assumptions, is that there is no need for such abstractions of possibility from the already existing, that it is precisely the struggle to be free from being made-subject, from colonization, to persist as (Other/)Different-Being, that is the already present of un-colonised human societies around the world.

that divides Being and Non-Being, and Being/Becoming 'political' as the transgressive (immanent or transcendental) act of emancipation.⁶⁷ What is seldom questioned however, are the presumptions that found the ontologies of Being/Non-Being which subsequently informs the philosophical ascription of subjectivity as 'Being/Becoming political'.

A different ontological reading of the present instead presents itself when viewed from a perspective that does not privilege the Same/totality as the point of departure from which Totality may be rescued, one that does not view a present of absence or inexistence from the vantage point of the Same/totality as the truth of Totality is preached. From this vantage point, we see that Being/Non-Being and Becoming are themselves ontological categories derived from an epistemological frame of Eurocentric Totality; the lens that views the present as Being/Non-Being and Becoming, is precisely a colonised and colonising lens. From this follows a different reading of the present from which we might reconsider the 'problem' for critical philosophy: the other of the (post)Enlightenment philosopher's Being/Beoming-subject is not Non-Being/Nothingness (absence/inexistence) but an also present Other/Different-Being.

We begin by remembering that absence and inexistence are already present, accounted for, operations of the regimes of order over embodied (Other-)Beings in 'history'; the absent and the inexistent are indeed already 'subjects' of Totality, enframed in/by Totality, made subject to a totalising narrative of the World in totality-as-present, and these include the various narratives of the critical (post-Enlightenment) thinker. Whilst Totality, as a philosophical invention - and that is all it is - may attempt to both objectify and subjectify bodies (be it in conservative or ruptural terms), and seek to define the closures and possibilities of narrating life-experiences, embodied lives remain persistently recalcitrant. The critical Western philosopher, whilst cognizant of disruption, whilst concerned with the rupture of presents, whilst desiring of a re-viewing of worlds that opens up futures to different possibilities out of/against the present, remains, still, enthralled by what is a mono-optic view of a universal truth of human experience and possibility as portended by the Enlightenment. As such, s/he is incapable of recognizing that not merely 'totality', but Totality itself - that invention of universal truth as conjured up by the Western mind - is the problem, as a problem *of* the present, a problem of both the ontology and epistemology of Being and being-ness in the world. The quintessentially 'modern' philosophical invention of the 'universal' provides a

⁶⁷ Isin provides an elaboration of the argument; *Being Political*. See also, Engin F. Isin, 'Ways of Being Political', *Distinktion*, Nr. 4, 2002, 7-28.

useful point from which some necessary corrections to Western ontological errors may be offered.

Slovaž Zizek, in his unapologetic ‘plea for Eurocentrism’,⁶⁸ asserts that what is really at stake in the advances of contemporary globalization is the Enlightenment’s ideal and truth of universality itself. This claim to the universal, the assertion of Reason as the means of Man’s mastery over nature (and God), the assumption of linear progression towards perfectibility as the march of History, these represent the fundamental tenets of the ideal in ‘Modern’ Western thought, that great universal, timeless, placeless, gift bestowed upon Humanity by the Enlightened inventions of the Western mind. Man’s task therefore is to Master himself towards perfectibility; Man’s destiny, duty even, is to pursue this path, true for all, for all time, universal, eternal. And this ‘European legacy’, as a continuation of classical Greek wisdom, through its Roman translation and its Judeo-Christian incarnations, right through to its present versions heralded by the Enlightenment, is precisely that heavy burden of philosophy in the present that requires, in this time of crisis and forgetting, the (very majestic Zizekian) labours of reiteration and rescue.

We might usefully remind ourselves, again, that the *idea* of universality itself is but a philosophical invention, a postulate for thinking worlds as the World is sought to be imagined and constructed. What happens, therefore, when we interrogate the history and the universalist credentials of ‘universality’ as a philosophical invention in time, and in the presence of those present in the world(s) of infinite variety?

The aspiration towards human perfectibility is not problematic in itself; it would be safe to assume that all cultures, whatever their ontological, cosmological, and epistemological hue, contain within them asserted truths of normality, inadequacy, and perfectibility, ‘universal’ in their assertion, therefore, from within their own particularity. Zizek’s ‘universality’ however is an invention of a particular nature, from a ‘point zero’ perspective, as Santiago Castro-Gomez has called it,⁶⁹ which defines the totalising arrogance of Eurocentric philosophies - a

⁶⁸ Zizek, ‘Eurocentrism’.

⁶⁹ See, R. Grosfoguel, ‘Transmodernity’, p. 4. A ‘point-zero’ perspective refers to a philosophical orientation that privileges the location of enunciation as universal (the ego-politics of knowledge), which conceals the particularity - historical, social, gendered, ‘racial’ - of its enunciation (the geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge). In opposition, Mignolo proposes instead ‘epistemic disobedience’ as a ‘means to delink from the illusion of the zero point epistemology.’; Walter D. Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 26 (7-8), 2009, 159-81, p. 160. Whilst the critique

perspective, a presumption, which denies any such contingent reach of its historical, contextual and cultural-cosmological particularity as it espouses its universal claims; as such the 'point-zero' perspective denies, often through violence, the presence of other legacies of knowledge, of other 'Beings' as present in the present of the world. Enrique Dussel is to the point:

What is most frightening is the certitude ... the dominating heroes have of representing the gods on earth – in bygone epochs – and now democracy, freedom, and civilization. ... The conquests of Latin America, the enslavement of Africa and its colonization, as well as that of Asia, are the dominating dialectical expansion of “the same” that assassinates “the other” and totalizes “the other” in “the same”. This huge dialectico-ontological process of human history simply went unperceived by the ideology of ideologies (even though it claims to be the critic of ideologies) – modern and contemporary European philosophy.⁷⁰

Another account, an account from the experience of the Enlightenment's Other-ed, therefore, tells the legacy of 'universalism' very differently.

When understood from the other side of the colonial difference, we see that the invention of universality and the idea of universalism has a very particular and particularist history, and more than that, we see that this modern invention of the 'philosophical problem' served to objectify that historical particularism as truth, as a 'point-zero' from which thought is thinkable, from which thinking itself begins anew. The asserted ideal of universal thinking, when its origins is located not in idealized 'Europe' as an ahistorical and mystical eternity but in a colonial-historical 'Europe' born out of the problem of a lustful, 'deadly encounter',⁷¹ belies the *actual* European legacy, not of universal but of 'abyssal' thinking - thinking which

of zero point epistemology and the call for epistemic disobedience is trenchant as a matter of freeing knowledge from its Eurocentric shackles and blindness, the extent to which such efforts at intellectual decolonization confronts the materiality of violence that defines the encounter between agents of Totality and the Other (as exteriority to Totality) remains unclear in Mignolo. For a discussion of the possible implications of 'illegality' as the material expression of decolonial disobedience, see Jayan Nayar, 'Thinking from the Ban', in Corinne Kumar ed., *Asking, We Walk: South as New Political Imaginary* (Bangalore: Streelekha Pub., forthcoming).

⁷⁰ Enrique Dussel, (trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky), *Philosophy of Liberation*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Pub. 2003), p. 52.

⁷¹ See, Zia Sardar, Ashis Nandy and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Barbaric Others: A Manifesto on Western Racism* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), Chap. 3.

separates the ideals of ‘emancipation’ and ‘regulation’ asserted as universal on the one side of the colonial divide, from the inflictions of ‘appropriation’ and ‘violence’ on the other, one visible, the other denied visibility. As de Sousa Santos explains,

The division is such that “the other side of the [abyssal] line” vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. ... Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other.⁷²

Revealed here, in contrast to critical Western-ized thinking, is the abyssal *actual* in the mythologised *ideal* of universal reason. In contrast to absence *ala* Norrie and inexistence *ala* Badiou, for example, *is present, already exists* - as a consequence of the inflicted idea of universal Humanity, of the colonial abyssal line - the *made-absent, made-inexistent*, the invisibilized present and presence of Other/Different-Beingness that is recalcitrant Exteriority as the radical other of Totality.⁷³ Put differently, the so-called universal ideals of the Enlightenment, of Being-Becoming, was ‘thought’ as Other/Different-Being was *actually* erased, negated, denied both philosophically and bodily, because of (the necessities for) such erasure, negation and denial. Frantz Fanon understood this well:

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking about Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all corners of the globe ... where they never stopped proclaiming that they were only anxious for the welfare of Man: today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind.⁷⁴

Fanon’s uncompromising indictment against ‘Europe’ and its ‘triumphs of the mind’ is what Enrique Dussel’s more recent statement of the hidden philosophical roots of universal Enlightened reason so effectively exposes: ‘[b]efore the *ego cogito* there is an *ego conquiro*; “I conquer” is the practical foundation of the “I think”’.⁷⁵ From across the colonial divide becomes visible, therefore, the centrality of ‘I conquer’ as the unspoken, ‘made-invisible’ even if not hidden, other, colonial-Modern truth of the Enlightenment’s universalism - the assertion of reason’s mastery towards universality and perfectibility was born out of an

⁷² de Sousa Santos, ‘Abyssal Thinking’, pp. 1-2.

⁷³ See Nayar, ‘The Politics of Hope’.

⁷⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1963 (2001)), p. 251.

⁷⁵ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, p. 3 (emphasis in original)

experience of mastery as domination, appropriation, and violence against the philosophically Other-ed, the bodily annihilated.

Thus, we see the *actual-in-the-ideal* of Western, modern/enlightened, thought - the 'problem' of universality is invented as the abyssal violence of the colonial divide is effected, in order that it may be so effected; indeed, the philosophers of colonisation/domination/appropriation too were masters of Badiouian invention as they confronted the 'problems' (of Other-Beings) of the(ir) present.⁷⁶ The result is the negation, and the erasure from cognizance, of the co-constitutiveness of coloniality with Modernity, and of the contemporaneity of Exteriority with Totality.⁷⁷

Seen from this other side of the colonial divide, therefore, we read differently the problem of Totality. As Anibal Quijano explains,

The radical absence of the 'other' not only postulates an isolated social existence in general. It also negates the very idea of social totality. As has been demonstrated by European colonial practices, the economic and epistemological paradigm makes it possible to obliterate every reference to any other possible 'subject' outside of the European context, that is, to make invisible the colonial order as part of the totality, at the very moment in which the very idea of Europe is in the process of constituting itself in relation to the rest of the world in colonization. The very idea of 'Europe' and

⁷⁶ For an elaboration on the representation of 'Man' as a manoeuvre that fixes ontology in 'Western' philosophy, see Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument', *The New Centennial Review* 3(3), 2003, 257-337. Also, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'The topology of being and the geopolitics of knowledge', *City*, Vol. 8(1), 2004, 29-56.

⁷⁷ And if it were thought this 'abyssality' is merely one of historical error, a consequence of human fallibility as Enlightened ideals were betrayed by post-Enlightenment political desires, then we might return to the present to remind us of persistent continuities; Upendra Baxi's reminder with respect to this our 'age of human rights' is apt:

[T]he politics of cruelties continues even as onerous declarations on human rights proliferate. A distinctly European contribution to recent history, the politics of organised intolerance and ethnic cleansing has been universalised in the "killing fields" of post-colonial experience. The early, middle and late phases of the Cold War orchestrated prodigious human suffering as well as an exponential growth of human rights enunciations. Upendra Baxi, 'Voices of Suffering and the Future of Human Rights', *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol 8, 1998, 125-169, p. 126 (footnotes omitted).

‘Occident’ is already a recognition of identity and, therefore, of the difference with other cultural experiences.⁷⁸

Here lies the crux of the problem of Eurocentric conceptions of ontology, of Totality. As an invention to rescue philosophy from the closures of totality-as-is, Totality remains limited by its blindness to the colonial difference, by its ontological presumptions derived from the European legacy of coloniality which ‘obliterates’, as Quijano puts it, the possibility of Other/Different-Being, as Exteriority to Totality.⁷⁹ It is worth expanding on the implications of such philosophies born of ontological obliterations. We make the following two observations.

First, the radical rescues of philosophy sought by the critical Eurocentric thinker ignores the contemporaneity of the colonial difference in the universal - that totality as present-actual is constructed out of radical Other-ing; that thinking Totality, as the (im)possibility of the present-real, is already implicated by the coloniality of abyssal thinking. We see that for all its progressive intent, therefore, critical (post)Enlightenment thought maintains a self-centredness in narrating the story of the world as ‘its’ story, with its voice, with its imagined beautiful future; its telling of history is History, marked significantly by a divide between a ‘before and after’ of Western Enlightenment;⁸⁰ its truth and aspiration of Humanity is a universal account of human evolution, desires and trajectory; its imagined future is a Future of Humanity towards its universal end.⁸¹ Such is the ‘point-zero’ perspective (Castro-Gomez),

⁷⁸ Quoted in Mignolo, *Local Histories*, p. 213.

⁷⁹ For a discussion of the significance of the decolonial ontology of Exteriority as Other-Being, see, Nayar, ‘Politics of Hope’.

⁸⁰ See Dipesh Chakrabarty’s re-view of Europe’s historiography in, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton: Princeton Uni. Press, 2000). For a different perspective which interrogates the idea of History itself, see Ashis Nandy, ‘History’s Forgotten Doubles’, *History and Theory*, Vol. 34 (2), 1995, 44-66.

⁸¹ It is interesting to note here Jameson’s observation on ‘the standpoint of dreams’, that all ‘utopian’ thinking is necessarily implicated by the specific ideologic and historical-class positions of its proponents; Jameson, ‘Politics of Utopia’, pp. 46-7. Grosfuegel, however, makes a crucial distinction between epistemic and social locations of thinking, whereby adopting a position of the latter (being socially located against oppressive power) does not necessarily entail being epistemologically so; ‘Transmodernity’, pp. 3-4. However, the reverse is also true – one might adopt epistemic locations against power whilst occupying a (permitted) class location of privilege; might this be the postmodern, ‘postcolonial’, ‘multicultural’ condition of contemporary global capitalism that critics such as Arif Dirlik so forcefully take to task; ‘The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20(2), 1994, 328-56.

the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo), the abyssal thinking (Santos), of still colonial orientations of post-Enlightenment thought. Critical thought might therefore lament the historical rupture between the Enlightenment and (post)Modernity as a result of (global) capitalism, it might grieve the failures and culpabilities of the institutions of Modernity to make actual the fulfilment of Humanity across geographic borders, it might suggest, as Enrique Dussel has termed it, an 'enmity within the totality' against 'the system' as a means to make alternate futures possible,⁸² but through it all, it remains (albeit, for some, increasingly with doubt) within the ontologic-epistemic borders of the Enlightenment, retaining the 'promise' itself as ideal and universal.⁸³

Following from the above, we observe secondly, and more important to our concern with the present, that Other/Different-Being, as Exteriority to the asserted ideal/actual/real World-as-Totality, is an already-present that does not, cannot, figure in the various 'rescues' of philosophy considered above;⁸⁴ aside from immanence (emergence out of absence) and transcendence (eruption out of inexistence), the contemporaneity of the colonial difference, and 'Radical Otherness' as Exteriority to Totality, remain pervasive actuals of and in the

⁸² See Dussel's critique of Derrida in, 'From Fraternity to Solidarity: Toward a Politics of Liberation' *The Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 38 (1), 2007, 73-92. This notion of enmity within totality, or put differently fraternal enmity, describes well the stance of critical Western thinkers. Dussel's point however is to bring to the fore a perspective of otherness - radical 'ontological enmity' - from the exteriority of Totality, that stands for the negation, rather than the improvement, of Totality.

⁸³ Walter D Mignolo and Madina V Tlostanova, 'Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge' *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 9 (2), 2006, 205-221, p. 208

⁸⁴ Again, Prozorov's is an interesting illustration of the philosophical view obscured by the Eurocentric assumption of Totality; Prozorov, *Foucault*. For Prozorov, after engaging in a rich representation of Foucault's insights on the politics of sovereignty and in the present contexts of the biopolitics of 'care', the 'to-come' of the subject lies in her reclaiming of originary decisional sovereignty through the refusal of prevailing biopolitical 'care'. This, for Prozorov is the radical future, the 'new', sovereignty of the individual reclaimed from biopolitics. What Prozorov is incapable of 'seeing' through this philosophical view is first, that all society (in whatever form) is about the making live and letting die (biopolitics, as it is so defined) of its 'members', and secondly, and consequently, that beside the asserted Totality of sovereign orders exist concurrently, other biopolitical societies of making live (and letting die as a necessary correlate) that entail different orderings of 'care'; see in this regard Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash for their accounts of convivial (other) being-ness; *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

present.⁸⁵ Despite the various colonising efforts of ‘sovereign’ and ‘rational’ negations, notwithstanding the past and present annihilations of colonial civil-ising missions, development projects, and humanitarian intervention for democratisation, undertaken both nationally and internationally, life in all its variety continue to persist as (Other/Different-)Being in the world. With every rejection of the attempted enclosure by the sovereign assertion of the boundaries of totality as the legitimate geography of present life (Being) and the permitted scope of future possibilities (Becoming), and with every rebellious affirmation of persistent and resurgent socialities that challenge both the banality, and the totality, of the present consensus, we are reminded that the task of Order is neither ever complete, nor completeable, not because of the ‘antinomies’ of (contested) law and justice with its ‘back and forths’ as per Norrie, nor due to the inherent eventual possibility of becoming through (unknowable, indeterminable) fidelities as per Badiou, but simply because (Other/Different-)Being *Is*, despite the closures of totality and the coloniality of Totality. This stubborn, rebellious, untamed, uncolonised, *Is* is what Ivan Illich called the wisdom of ‘vernacular values’,⁸⁶ Walter Mignolo termed border thinking,⁸⁷ Boaventura de Sousa Santos identified as the ecology of knowledges,⁸⁸ Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash report as the rich soil of cultures;⁸⁹ these all remain present, and persistent, notwithstanding the ‘point-zero’ perspectives of Eurocentrism. Philosophical orientations that are, either knowingly or unknowingly, blind to such a present and which apparently seek refuge either in immanence or transcendence in order that the purity of its philosophical truths may be retained in faith are at best an abandonment of her subject to a totalising and limiting imagination of the present, and at worst, an inexcusable arrogant abrogation of philosophical responsibility - Zizek’s ‘plea’ for Eurocentrism is recalled to mind. Instead, we might heed Mignolo:

Modernity ... carries on its shoulders the heavy weight and responsibility of coloniality. The modern criticism of modernity (postmodernity) is a necessary

⁸⁵ The Radical Other stands opposed to the ‘suffering other’ that so obsesses concerned and well-meaning thinkers of hope; see Nayar, ‘The Politics of Hope’.

⁸⁶ See, Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981).

⁸⁷ Mignolo, *Local Histories*; Mignolo and Tlostanova, ‘Thinking from the Borders’.

⁸⁸ Boaventura de Sousa Santos ed., *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* (London: Verso, 2007).

⁸⁹ Esteva and Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism*.

practice, but one that stops where the colonial differences begin. The colonial differences, around the planet, are the houses where border epistemology dwells.⁹⁰

By shifting philosophical enquiry, away from an effort to postulate a possible (unknowable, unnameable) 'real' future for the ideal (as it travels its precarious journeys through the actuals of history) to one which de-invisibilizes the actual of colonial difference in the philosophical 'ideal' of Totality itself, might we attend to the (problem of the) present, differently viewed and re-membered.

But what implications follow from such ontological corrections argued for here? The question may be asked (as indeed it has been by colleagues with whom the reflections in this essay have been shared): does this not ignore, or worse deny, the realities of struggles for subjectivity within the 'political' of all those currently denied presence?; is this not mere nihilism that portends no constructive possibility for critical theory-practice?; is not the challenge, ever more pressing, to ensure the opening up of the 'political' to those denied 'voice' and place against the exclusions and Bans that define the present-actual? By way of response, let me be clear that what I am suggesting here is not an abandonment of the imperatives of the present, but a perspectival change on the present itself.

IV. Desubjectification: A Suggestion, by Way of Conclusion.

The perplexities of the critical philosopher are clearly many as the present confounds and disappoints: 'exception' has come to be identified as norm under the present condition of sovereignty;⁹¹ the business of militarism ('security', in doublespeak) and impoverishment ('austerity') continue unchecked by repeated exhortations of 'human security' and 'human development';⁹² the 'war on terror' and its exigencies of manifold 'illiberal' practices of human violation increasingly and unashamedly define the contemporary agenda of national and global governance to restructure the 'constitutional democratic'-state;⁹³ trans-territorial

⁹⁰ Mignolo, *Local Histories*, p. 37.

⁹¹ Giorgio Agamben (trans. Kevin Attell), *State of Exception* (Chicago, Uni. Of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁹² Duffield, 'Savages'.

⁹³ Didier Bigo, 'Globalized (in)Security: the Field and the Ban-opticon', in Didier Bigo ed., *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2008), 5-49; Michael Dillon, 'Governing Terror: The State of Emergency of Biopolitical Emergence', *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 1, 2007, 7-28.

materialities of ‘global law’ regimes and transnational professional regimes of management dominate much of the actual workings of national and world orders;⁹⁴ human persons find themselves increasingly expunged of the philosophical-political quality of ‘Man’ as subject-with-rights in the located fault-lines of contemporary ‘political geography’ through the entrenchment of innovative ‘political’ categories of illegal ‘outsiders’ (migrant workers, refugees, etc) and ‘criminal insiders’ (the ‘terror suspect’, the insurgent, the ‘national threat’, the rampant poor etc),⁹⁵ etc.

These then are the conditions of the present from which, out of which, philosophical inventions for the ‘problem’ are sought; from which, out of which, as we have seen, the present is sought to be reclaimed for a different future of presences. And so, ‘critical’ literature abounds with well-intentioned but essentially misdirected contemplations that never cease to ‘think’ emancipation, never cease to postulate so many ‘shoulds’ for the wise and the good and the powerful to adhere to, and for the ‘critical’ theorist/activist to excite over, to urge and to agitate for. If only, we did this, if only power did that, if only our institutions were to follow these (enlightened) pathways that ‘we’ critical thinkers have illuminated, our world of misery would be enhanced, brought out of darkness into light, the many promises of past and on-going presents fulfilled.⁹⁶ We here pause.

For too long we, ‘critical philosophers’, have been enthralled by the existential imaginary and conceptual vocabulary of ‘Western’ ontologic-epistemology, by the enduring promise of universal Becoming and the post-Enlightenment assumption, or more appropriately, appropriation, of ‘Being’, as only existent, only worthwhile, within the ontological frame of the ‘Modern’ with all its trappings – to Be is to be that philosophically constructed, then existentially subjected, (Hu)Man that is the rational-individual, who begins sociality with the

⁹⁴ Andreas Fischer-Lescano and Gunther Teubner, ‘Regime Collisions: The Vain Search for Legal Unity in the Fragmentation of Global Law’ *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Vol. 25, 2004, 999-1046; Bigo, ‘Globalized (in)Security’.

⁹⁵ Nicholas De Genova, ‘The Production of Culprits: From Deportability to Detainability in the Aftermath of “Homeland Security”’, *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 11 (5), 2007, 421-48; Anne McNevin, ‘Irragular migrants, neoliberal geographies and spatial frontiers of “the political”’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 33, 2007, 655-74; Peter Nyers, ‘The accidental citizen: acts of sovereignty and (un)making citizenship’, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 35 (1), 2006, 22-41.

⁹⁶ For a critique of ‘global justice’ thinking in this regard, see, Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, ‘Resisting ‘Global Justice’: disrupting the colonial ‘emancipatory’ logic of the West’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 30 (8), 2009, 1395-1409; also, Nayar, ‘Politics of Hope’.

cognizance of individuality as a sovereign original as the antagonisms of relationships are confronted, as the vicissitudes of Becoming - of finding place, voice, as a sovereign original - are sought to be overcome. From this ontological condition, as understood, we 'think/invent' the problematic of the individual and the collective, we labour the problem of the One and the Many, the particular and the universal, the private and the public, all familiar themes in post-Enlightenment attempts to reconcile the perceived contradiction between freedom and order, of individual sovereign-subjectivity and collectivised state-sovereignty. Thus, we have the philosophical invention of the 'political' as the possibility of ontology, the assumed/imagined location-moment of Becoming-individual-in-the collective. Thus, we have the philosophical invention of the 'subject' as ontological possibility, of the Being-individual-in-the collective. Through this lens then is the present viewed, and 'lack' – absence in the Same, inexistence in the light of the Same – sought to be overcome as an emancipatory ideal, thought of as the possibility of Becoming-Being. For the 'Western-ized' mind, colonised (and I use this term purposefully) by the philosophical and material actuals of post-Enlightenment Modernity as a Being-subject-ed, this aspiration, this burden of 'thinking', this assumption of Being, this grasping at the 'political' as the (only) known conduct of Becoming-Being, is understandable – we 'see' lack from our locations of presence in the Same; we interpret struggles against the oppressive machinations of the Same as struggles to be subject in the Same, even if for the Same transformed.

Yet, whilst we 'philosophers' continue chasing our elusive subject, and whilst we profit (in our permitted institutional locations) from such critical labours, we know that the world also continues along its present trajectory of globalised exploitation and violence in the name of 'inclusion' - for freedoms (of compulsory consumption) for all. We also know, and we are concerned to celebrate and validate no doubt, that within this world as ordered exist, despite its order, because of such ordering, ongoing and persistent realities of disruption – both of 'subject-citizens' as they daily engage in the politics of rights, and of the purportedly 'uncounted' and the 'Banned', as they unpredictably erupt in confrontation against the consensual public space of the present. However, it is at this juncture that the critical gaze onto the present requires correction.

First, we mostly ignore an inconvenient subject; only a rare few have paid any considerable attention to this truth of the present, and even so, with little philosophical import. Totality-as-present – a present thought out of, and effected as a result of, the colonial-modern past – is constituted not just by the presence of subject-citizens or abject-absences/inexistences, but by

licentious and *exemptional* traversers of globality – those elusive figures of the contemporary that variously emerge in ambiguous guises as the ‘investor’, the ‘market’, the ones with no fixed-abode, unbounded by territorial constraints, the welcome ‘guest’ the world over. This is to say, the presence of ‘rights’, and absences of ‘exceptions’, are contemporaneous with the theoretically/philosophically elusive exemptions of the licentious; we are confronted with a mutual co-constitutiveness of totality in this respect. Simply put, rights and Bans are negotiated as the exigencies of licence are weighed and its necessary compulsions for order imagined and effected. Totality, and its exclusions, with its lacks, its absences and inexistences as conventionally viewed, therefore, is precisely constructed in order that such abjections serve the desires of licence, enable the freedoms of exemptional appropriation. The place of these exemptional subjects – the ‘transnational capitalist class’ as Leslie Sklair identified them – appear little to be incorporated into the critical philosopher’s contemplations of the present.⁹⁷ The enchantment with the (post)Enlightenment assertion of the political-‘We’, of a collective public-‘belonging’, thus persists, even whilst the many clues of its falsehood are often identified.

And this continuing enchantment contributes to another view that becomes, therefore, obscured, perverted. What I have in mind here is the view on the ‘decolonial’, a view which requires the abandonment of the enchantment with (post)Enlightenment ontologic-epistemology and a remembering of the ontological implication of colonialism, however outdated it might be regarded by contemporary fashionistas of critical philosophy. What if we understand the foundation of historical colonisation, the operation of the colonality of power, precisely as the appropriation of (the philosophy of) Being-Becoming, as the theory-practice

⁹⁷ Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001. A recent take-up and revision of Sklair’s analysis can be found in William K Carroll, *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the 21st Century*, Zed Books, London, 2010. The sociological analyses of Sklair which detailed the transnationality of the ‘capitalist class’ and which pressed for the need to re-view ‘class’ from a global perspective appears to have little filtered through to critical philosophical circles as such favorites as ‘sovereignty’ and the ‘political’ are unendingly pondered over. Of the few interesting theoretical considerations of the ‘actuals’ of exemptionalism as I put it (and I make no apology for excluding so-called theories of ‘cosmopolitanism’), particularly provocative is Andreas Fischer-Lescano’s and Gunther Teubner’s theorization of ‘Global Law’ regimes; see, ‘Regime Collisions’. However, theirs is less a critical engagement with the possibilities of ‘resistance’ to global power, and more an accurate description of the actual operation of post-territorial ‘Law’ systems.

of 'being-made-subject', both in its forms of presences and absences?⁹⁸ What if, thus, we open the possibility that we have mis-read the present of all struggles as struggles of the absent/inexistent to Become,⁹⁹ and instead begin to ask if the struggles of the present may be viewed as those of radical Other/Different Being, uncolonised in their ontological Beingness even if not in their existential made-to-be-ness, to resist being 'made-subject' as absent/inexistent/Banned?¹⁰⁰ What if we have indeed been obscured from understanding the very foundational, ontological bases for 'decolonisation' as a liberation from the colonisation

⁹⁸ We might understand Foucault as being, amongst thinkers of the Western tradition, one who comes close to such an interrogation of the present. Indeed, Foucault realized that to understand the present it was more useful to investigate the manifold, actual, embodied operations of power - as relationships of discipline (and knowledge), and biopolitical management - and on the ways in which as a consequence subjectivities are constructed, rather than to recover some truth about the rationalities that inhere in sovereignty (Totality); this task of excavating the genealogies of subjectivity finds repeated emphases in Foucault's writings, as succinctly restated in 'The Subject and Power'. Whilst Foucault's emphases on the materiality of the operation of power/resistance reminds us of the need to return philosophy to the life of power as relation, what is absent in Foucault's excavations of subjectivities is the contextualization of power/sovereignty in the colonial difference. This said, it would appear that if Foucault, through his identification of biopower as an innovation of governmentality in place of the previously regarded assumption of government through sovereign power, usefully pointed to important clues regarding the rationalities, and implications of 'making-subject', then the subsequent post-Foucauldian delving into 'biopolitics' heralded by Agamben, and latterly Roberto Esposito ((trans. Timothy Campbell), *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: Uni. Of Minnesota Press, 2008)), I venture, has served more to obfuscate rather than clarify a reading of the present.

⁹⁹ As a telling example of this tendency, Žižek's dissatisfaction with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico is illustrative. For Žižek, notwithstanding the positive, ruptural manifestation that was the uprising since 1994, the disappointment is that the movement remains 'ambiguous' in its 'revolutionary' content; see Žižek, *Lost Causes*, p. 310. A corrective to this colonising, and colonised interpretive lens is provided by Ashis Nandy:

These self-expressions [of spontaneous defiance and rebellions of the oppressed] are not usually cast in the language of liberation; even less frequently can they be accommodated in a proper theory of liberation... we, standing outside, can try and translate these self-expressions into our language and construct for ourselves a theory of liberation out of the *primitive, populist* theories of oppression and spontaneous acts of subversion, but these are our needs, not theirs.

Ashis Nandy, 'Shamans, Savages and the Wilderness: On the Audibility of Dissent and the Future of Civilizations', in Corrine Kumar, *Asking We Walk*, p. 228 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁰ No doubt, there may indeed be many struggles which do adopt and aspire for the promise of salvation into Same. That this may be so does not detract from the suggestion offered here.

of the ‘political’ as the imposition of (a particular) Being/Becoming-subject?¹⁰¹ Might we, who assume the burdens of critical philosophy, then begin to consider the implications of releasing Being-ness in all its recalcitrant richness from the colonising clutches of Western colonial-modern philosophies of Being-in-the-political, not just for the wretched of the earth, but for ourselves as we contemplate the purported ‘normalities’, and lacks, of human being-ness, of ontology, as we ‘invent’ the problems of the present for critical philosophy?

The task, of the present, for a philosophy in the present, is as I see it, one of ‘desubjectification’: to view, read, name, desubjectification as the actual and real of struggles against the continuing coloniality of the ‘political’. This is not to say that being-ness does not find expression, as assertion, as struggle, in the locations-moments of the ‘public-political’ spaces constructed in our present actual-totality; these ‘institutions’ of Becoming-Being indeed do represent locations of antagonisms, of rights-assertions, of Rancierian dissensus. What I am suggesting however is that we abandon the assumption that in this public-political instances is properly Being-Becoming expressed, its moments encapsulated and manifested. Rather, I suggest we view these existential emergences into the coloniser’s ontologic-epistemological sites and engagements as *encounters* of incommensurability. For this purpose, it is clear that we need to reconsider our vocabulary; the idea/invention of the ‘political’ indeed is entrenched in the philosopher’s epistemology; to break free from its hold, difficult. Perhaps, it will do for us to somehow reclaim, as many have sought to do, the political as a location-moment of rupture. I think this unsatisfactory. Instead, we require, I believe, a conscious relegation of the ‘political’ from its ontological primacy. The re-introduction of ‘encounter’ as a distinct philosophical invention is necessary, therefore, for a fuller philosophy of the present, to bring to light the presence of the incommensurable ontological conflicts that pertain as actual-in-the-present.

De-subjectification then becomes the critical philosophical problem as we re-view the present.¹⁰² This entails a necessary reconsideration, a ‘de-naming’ as I prefer, of the

¹⁰¹ On this point, Ikeotuonye makes a powerful and timely argument against the misunderstanding, even ‘appropriation’, of Frantz Fanon by (even sympathetic) Eurocentric commentators, translating Fanon’s anger and rejection of ‘Europe’ into the philosophical frames of Being and subjectivity that remain consistent with, and even reinforcing of, Western ontological assumptions. The same, it could be said, is true also of Mohandas Gandhi; see Ikeotuonye, ‘*Connexus Theory*’.

¹⁰² De-subjectification, as suggested here, is quite different from recent ‘Eurocentric’ efforts to free the ‘subject’ from the grips of the sovereign-political domain; we might recall Prozorov in this connection (see above note 83), or contrast Judith Butler’s resort to the notion of some ante-political ‘performativity’ (*Excitable Speech: A*

foundational premises of 'sovereignty' which originates, and as a result of its reinvention by Carl Schmitt, reaffirmed, the ontological error of the 'political' in post-Enlightenment, Eurocentric thought.¹⁰³ This task, however, remains for a future doing.

Politics of the Performative (London: Routledge, 1997; also, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham Uni. Press, 2005). There is nothing pure or prior to the present, as historical reality and materiality, in de-subjection; it is entirely embroiled in the messy encounters of breaking the bonds of subject-in/to-the political.

¹⁰³ Carl Schmitt (trans. George Schwab), *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: Uni. Of Chicago Press, 1985 (2005)); and, (trans. George Schwab), *The Concept of the Political* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Uni. Press, 1976). Indeed, a Schmittian re-turn is a notable feature of contemporary critical contemplations about 'sovereignty' and the (im)possibility of the 'political' in the present. This, in my view, requires a more critical interrogation.